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WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

SECOND PAPER.

THE history of this great and venerable building is extremely interesting. St. Sebert, king of the East Saxons, or king of Essex, is said by historians to have founded the first Abbey in the seventh century, in the year 610. It was destroyed by the Danes, and afterward rebuilt in 958 by King Edgar. The church, becoming ruinous, was again splendidly rebuilt in 1055-65 by Edward the Confessor, and filled with monks from Exeter. It was dedicated on the 28th of December, 1065. Pope Nicholas II. constituted the Abbey the place for the coronation of the kings of England, and here these affairs have taken place ever since with great pomp and magnificence. Even if the ceremony had been performed elsewhere, it was thought necessary to repeat it at Westminster in the presence of all the great personages of the land:

"That antique pile behold,
Where royal heads receive the sacred
gold;
It gives them crowns, and does their ashes
keep:
There made like gods, like mortals there
they sleep,
Making the circle of their reign complete;
These suns of empire, where they rise
they set."

At the moment the crown is put
on, the Tower guns fire a royal
salute.

Henry III. in 1220-69 once more rebuilt the Abbey in a magnificent and beautiful style. In the reigns of Edward II., Edward III., and Richard II., the great cloisters, the abbot's house, and principal monastic buildings were erected. The western part of the nave and aisles were rebuilt between the years 1340 and 1483. The west front and the great window were built by Richard III. and Henry VII.; the latter commenced the chapel which bears his name, the first stone being laid on the 24th of January, 1502. In 1540 the Abbey was dissolved and made a bishopric, but was finally made a collegiate church by Elizabeth, in 1560. During the reign of Henry VIII., the Abbey suffered great injuries, and



CLOISTERS.

still greater by the Puritans, it being then occupied (July, 1643) as barracks for the soldiers of Parliament. After having sustained these injuries, Sir Christopher Wren undertook the reconstruction of it, and in the most able manner added to its beauty and solidity. Upon close examination, he found nothing to countenance the belief that the Abbey was erected on the ruins of a pagan temple. Several singular discoveries were made, however, of ancient monuments, and also the mosaic pavement in front of the altar in the choir. The great west window

and the western towers were rebuilt in the reigns of George I. and II., 1714-60. On the 28th of December, 1865, the 800th anniversary of the foundation of Westminster Abbey was celebrated.

Since 1856, a large number of the windows have been painted, illustrating the most beautiful and touching portions of the "Te Deum." The large west window, painted in 1735, represents Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and the Twelve



CHAPEL OF HENRY VII., WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Patriarchs, with a large number of royal arms. The south, or marigold window, of stained glass, was designed in 1847, and represents different subjects from the Old Testament, incidents in the life of Christ, and the word "Jehovah" surrounded by angels. The north, or rose window, is commemorative of our Saviour, the Twelve Apostles and the Four Evangelists. Westminster is so called on account of its western situation with regard to St. Paul's Cathedral, or from there being formerly a monastery named Eastminster, on the hill now called Great Tower Hill. So large is the Abbey and so extensive are the repairs which need to be constantly made, one can hardly enter the building without finding, somewhere among its vast arcades, skilled workmen, busy over mosaic, marble, bronze, or "stained window richly dight," and the very cloisters are being repaired until the tracery of the arches shall be as bright and sharp as they were half a thousand years ago.

Washington Irving, when he stood amid the tombs of so many of the mighty dead, was impressed with the "mournful magnificence" of the place, and asked, "What is this vast assembly of sepulchres but a treasury of humiliation? A huge pile of reiterated homilies on the emptiness of renown and the certainty of oblivion." Writing of this Abbey, he took for his motto this grand Elizabethan epigram:

"When I behold with deep astonishment,
To famous Westminster, how there resort
Living in brass or stony monument,
The princes and the worthies of all sort,
Do I not see reformed nobilitie,
Without contempt, or pride, or ostentation,
And look upon offenseless majestie,
Naked of pomp or earthly domination?
And how a play-game of a painted stone,
Contents the quiet, now, and silent sprites,
Whom all the world, which late they stood upon,
Could not content, nor quench their appetites.
Life is a frost of cold felicities,
And death the thaw of all our vanities."

Those who read the passages in the life of the late Charles Knight, the famous London bookseller and publisher, will learn how he, while a boy, in common with the other inhabitants of Windsor, was on familiar terms with King George III. The whole court, in the reign of that monarch, lived in the eyes of the public. So, speaking of the tombs of the kings of England, in the Abbey, Canon Kingsley says: "The

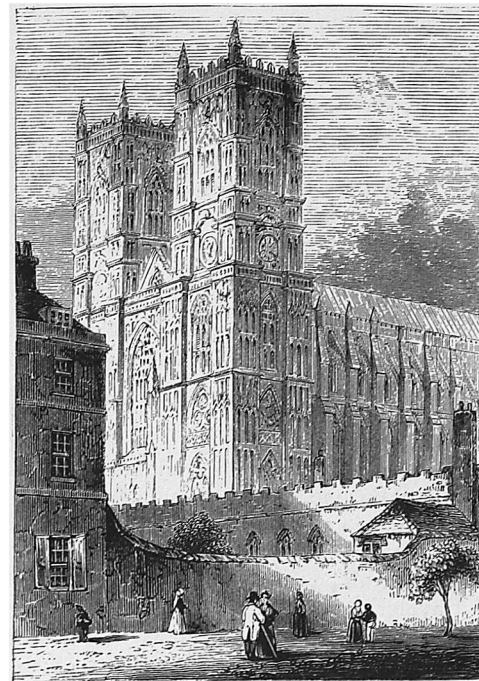
sepulchral chapels built by Henry III. and Henry VII. might have stood alone in their glory. No meaner dust need ever have mingled with the dust of Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, Guelphs. But it has been the peculiar privilege of the kings of England, that neither in life nor in death have they been parted from their people. As the council of the nation and the courts of law have pressed into the palace of Westminster, and engirdled the very throne itself, so the ashes of the great citizens of England have pressed into the sepulchre of the kings, and surrounded them as with a guard of honor after their death. We are sometimes inclined bitterly to contrast the placid dignity of our recumbent kings with Chatham gesticulating from the northern transept, or Pitt from the western door, or Shakspeare leaning on his column in Poets' Corner, or Wolfe expiring by the chapel of St. John."

The most beautiful and extensive chapel in the Abbey is that of Henry VII., the cloisters of which are shown in the illustration. The Gothic ceiling, resting on lofty arches, is exquisitely carved. The mass of tracery and ornamentation in stone on every side, consisting of flowers, roses, bosses, pendants, panels, and armorial bearings, is quite bewildering. In the nave of this chapel the Knights of the Order of the Bath were formerly installed, and here may be seen their richly carved stalls, shaded with Gothic canopies, while above are their coats of arms, heraldic devices and banners. The tomb of the founder of this chapel is highly carved and ornamented, and bears the effigies

of Henry VII. and his queen, Elizabeth, the last of the House of York who wore the English crown, resting upon a slab of black marble. It is surrounded by an elaborate screen of curiously wrought brass work. In the south aisle of this chapel lies in royal pomp poor Mary Queen of Scots:

"Nothing is left of her
Now, but pure womanly."

An alabaster effigy of the unfortunate queen rests upon the beautiful tomb. In the corresponding aisle,



WESTERN TOWERS.

upon the north, is the tomb erected by King James I. to Queen Elizabeth, bearing the recumbent effigy of that sovereign supported by four lions. Queen Mary, who is said to have burned some seventy persons a year at the stake while she reigned, rests in the same vault. The lines at the head of the monument on this double tomb are as follows: "Fellows in the kingdom and in the tomb, here we sleep; Mary and Elizabeth, the sisters; in hope of the resurrection." The Abbey, after life's fitful fever, is a place of peace for all.

— Fuller-Walker.